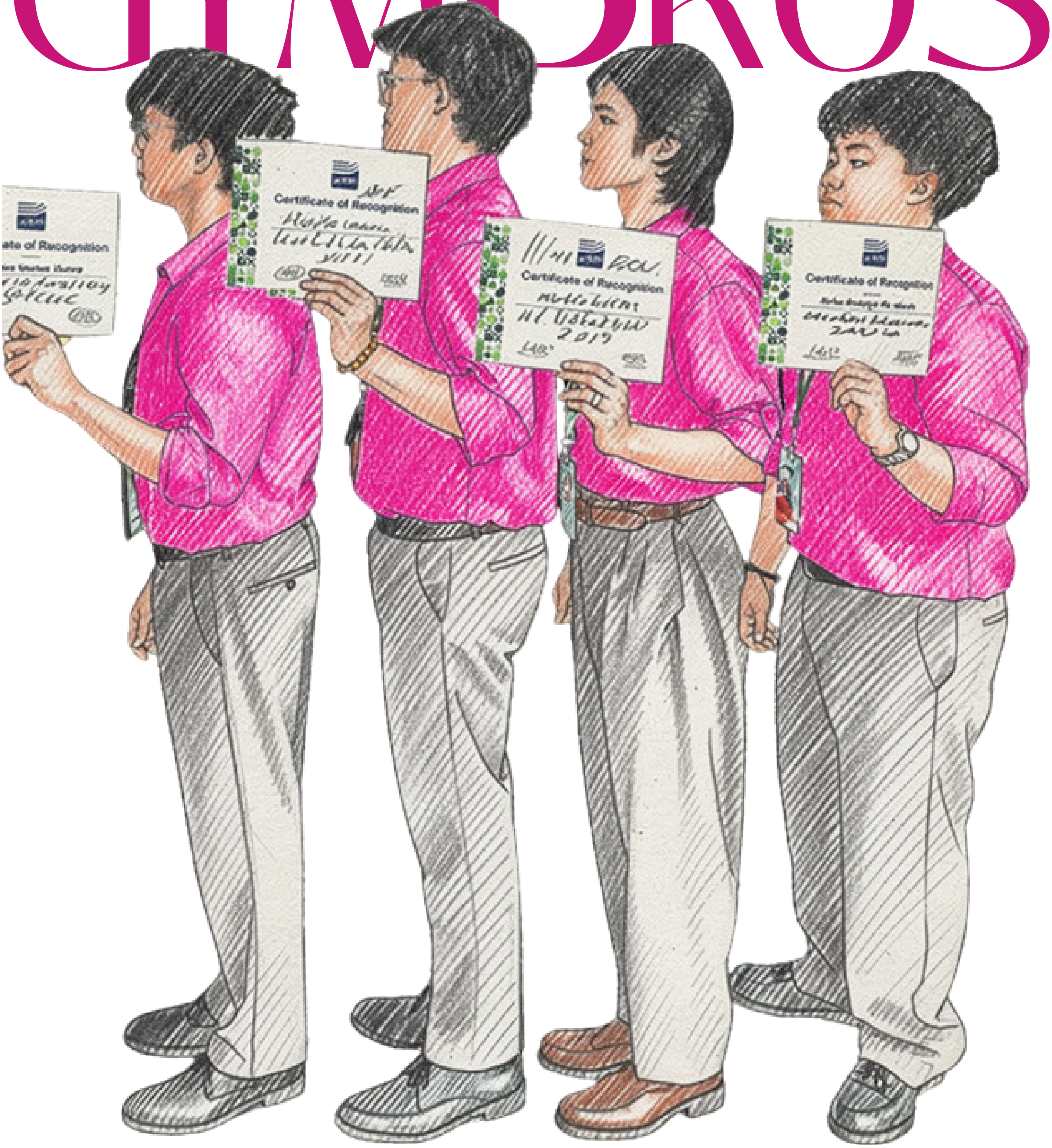
TERM 3, AY 2025-2026 | JULY 2026

The GymBros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A Research Portfolio

ULSANO | IFURUNG | DUNGCA | GOMEZ

DUNGCA ET AL.

DUNGCA, Jose Gabriel Parico

Jose Gabriel Dungca is a student taking the Humanities & Social Sciences strand at De La Salle University Senior High School Manila (DLSU SHS-M). He is the incumbent president of the DLSU SHS Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu & Grappling Organization, where he oversees all projects and events in the organization from preparation to implementation, as well as coordinating with the college counterpart organization and related offices. He is also a broadcaster of Pana Verde, the official Filipino publication for DLSU SHS-M, where he usually reports on protests and other local coverages outside the campus. As a student almost finished with secondary education, he, along with his groupmates and under the guidance of their research adviser and mentor, was preparing their feminist paper about the experiences of young adult Filipino women training in bakal gyms to be published in an international journal.

GOMEZ, Kristan Lloyd Razon

For the greater part of his life, Kristan Lloyd R. Gomez has found a home in writing. What began as a childhood fascination with stories has grown into a lifelong pursuit of giving meaning to words, believing that every piece has the power to move hearts, preserve voices, and inspire change. Whether through literature, journalism, theater, or research, he continues to see writing not merely as a craft, but as a way of understanding both people and the world they inhabit.

A Grade 12 Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMSS) student at De La Salle University Senior High School, Manila Campus, Kristan has consistently been recognized for his academic excellence and exemplary conduct. Beyond the classroom, he serves as the Head Writer of Teatro Lasalyano - Manila, is a features writer for Pana Verde, and is an active member of the Externals Committee of the DLSU SHS Student Council and Student Committee. Across every role he undertakes, storytelling remains at the heart of his work.

Through every story he tells and every page he writes, Kristan hopes to create works that do more than inform. He strives to leave readers with something lasting, something that lingers long after the final sentence.

IFURUNG, Thomas Vito Rivera

At eighteen years old, Thomas Vito R. Ifurung continues to shape his journey through curiosity, creativity, and a commitment to learning. Born on January 23, 2008, he is currently a Grade 12 student in the Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMSS) strand at De La Salle University Senior High School. Thomas completed both his elementary and junior high school education at Claret School of Quezon City, where he cultivated not only his academic foundation but also his passion for leadership, creativity, and service beyond the four walls of the classroom. During his time there, he was recognized with the Best in Filipino and Best in Creative Writing awards, reflecting his early appreciation for language and storytelling. His years in school have been marked by active involvement in academic initiatives, student leadership, and various organizations that have continuously refined his skills and broadened his perspective. He is a member of the DLSU SHS Pep Squad as the Head Drummer and also became a member of their official high school publication, Pana Verde, an experience that strengthened his ability to craft compelling narratives and communicate ideas with clarity and purpose. Through every opportunity he embraces, Thomas continues to grow as a student, a writer, and a storyteller who believes in the enduring power of words.

ULSANO, Redentor Daniel Ordanza

Currently studying at De La Salle University Senior High School in the Humanities and Social Sciences strand, Redentor Daniel O. Ulsano enjoys writing. He has been a consistent presence in journalism since childhood. He first published in the school paper titled Umalahokang BCClan in Grade 9; this was followed by The Bosconian in Grade 10; and he currently serves on The Animo as senior staff. He is the author of several notable publications such as “A Historic EALAvation” and “Running Against Gravity.” As a writer, he represented Don Bosco Tarlac in the annual University of the Philippines Pataasan Diwa essay-writing competition in Grade 10. His speech, titled “Philippine Political Dynasties: Tracing the Footsteps of Hereditary Power and Fame,” was also selected among the Top 10 of the annual DLSU Green Talks in Grade 11. He is currently working to complete his high school diploma and plans to pursue a Bachelor of Science in Accountancy in college.

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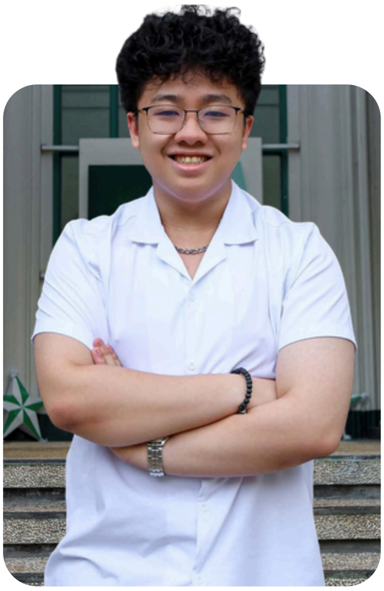
editor's note



Some stories live in places no one thinks to look. Ours began in the narrow streets of Filipino neighborhoods, inside gyms built from iron and camaraderie, and in the voices of women who showed up to spaces that were never quite made for them.

This portfolio is the full account of that journey. From the first question we dared to ask to the final word we committed to our manuscript. Everything gathered here represents not justa written study but a year of showing up, adapting, and refusing to stop. What you hold is not simply an academic output. It is proof that the stories worth telling are almost always the ones hiding in plain sight.

We hope you find something worth carrying with you.

Kristan Lloyd R. Gomez

The GYMBROS

MEMBER
Jose Gabriel P. Dungca

MEMBER
Kristan Lloyd R. Gomez

MEMBER
Thomas Vito R. Ifurung

MEMBER
Redentor Daniel O. Ulsano

RESEARCH ADVISER
Janeson M. Miranda

RESEARCH MENTOR
Nathaniel Rey D. Ferrer

HUMSS12-D
AY 2025-2026

De La Salle University
Senior High School

research topic

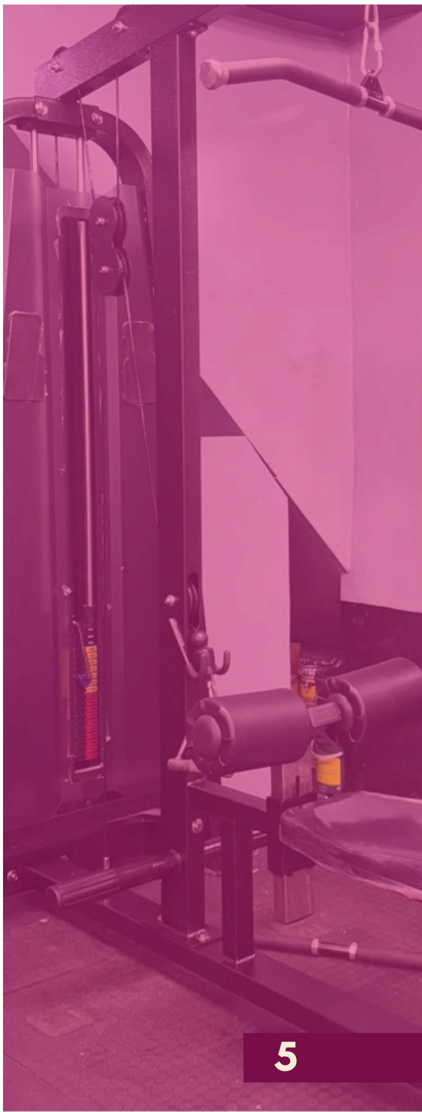
Dungca, 2008

In a gym full of iron and sweat, the bar is loaded for a woman surrounded by the gazes of men and a culture that discourages her from keeping pushing… or do they?

With gendered dynamics and stigma surrounding bakal gyms in a patriarchal society, women continue to pursue fitness in such spaces. Our research centers on the feminine experience of training in a bakal gym amidst all the gendered and cultural dynamics, and how these factors shape their identity.

Through semi-structured interviews with young adult Filipino women who train in bakal gyms, we learned about their experiences. Afterward, we analyzed these experiences through Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, integrating the lenses of Feminist Phenomenology and the Social Identity Theory.

Through our research, we found that their experiences show a unique cultural perspective that not only shows the reality of bakal gyms but also why women continue to train in these spaces.



research objectives

The clang of iron and the hush between sets became the starting point for our inquiry: to trace the lived experiences of Filipino women who train in bakal gyms, and to read between the lines of their stories. We followed their footsteps into a larger social landscape, anchoring each account in three intimate dimensions, namely their sense of identity, sense of belonging, and sense of self-worth, framed through Tajfel and Turner's Social Identity Theory.

We also listened for solutions. From the women's own voices emerged practical recommendations: personal strategies to rebuild confidence and reshape daily routines, and navigation strategies to steer through exclusion and microaggressions. These aim to transform negative encounters into opportunities for a stronger, more positive self-concept while training in a space that is at once physical, social, and deeply personal.

✍ *Ulsano, 2007*

research significance

At first glance, bakal gyms can seem like nothing more than gritty, rugged spaces filled with rusty weights and dumbbells that clang loudly while people push through every set with real determination. For some, that energy feels intimidating, especially for women gym-goers. But if you look past the surface, you notice something essential: it is more than the weights and the noise. It is a space where people genuinely show up for each other, where relationships are built, and where you grow stronger not just physically, but in confidence and mindset too.

Beneath the clatter of iron, bakal gyms are lively hubs of grit and camaraderie, yet their stories, especially those of young Filipino women, remain largely unexplored. While most research treats women's struggles in male-dominated fitness spaces in broad strokes, it misses the particular rhythms of the local bakal gym: quick coaching between sets, quiet nods of encouragement, and small moments that stitch community together. This study listens to young adult Filipino women to reveal how these spaces shape identity, belonging, and self-worth, showing that bakal gyms are not just sites for physical training but unexpected spaces for resilience and collective care.

✍ *Ifurung, 2008*

JANESON MIRANDA

Janeson M. Miranda has been a full-time faculty member at De La Salle University Senior High School since 2020 and now serves as the Academic Coordinator for Research in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences. For almost 13 years, he has handled multilevel groups of junior and senior high school learners. He earned his master's degree at the same University with a thesis that focused on autoethnography on Artificial Intelligence. He was the former Managing Editor of Sinaya Journal, the Philippine pioneer journal for senior high school educators and students. In 2022, he was awarded the DLSU IS Outstanding AnimoSpace Designer for Senior High School. He has published individual and collaborative papers in peer-reviewed journals, such as the Quartile 1 international journal 3L: Language, Linguistics, Literature, the NRCP Journal, and the Pacific Asia Conference on Language, Information and Computation (PACLIC) Proceedings among others. He delivered presentations at local and international conferences, including the EDUtech Asia Conference in Singapore in 2024.

Mr. Miranda earned his Bachelor's degree from Bicol University College of Education (cum laude) and received the Outstanding College Graduate in Scholarship award. As a campus journalist during his college years, he was a regional and national winner in news writing and was the Editor-In-Chief of the College of Education's student publication. Sir Janeson's research interests include the language of media, politics, and pop culture, educational linguistics, and critical pedagogy. During his spare time, he enjoys watching K-drama and writing poetry in English and Filipino, as well as his vernacular.

JANESON

From the beginning of our research journey together, I expected an inexplicable pressure that would, I thought, surround our team. As I scrolled through the details, I saw "De La Salle University Senior High School's (DLSU SHS) Academic Coordinator for Research for the Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMSS)." In the past, working with advisers with such undeniable achievements was never easy for our team. Based on those experiences and our preconceptions of Sir Janeson Miranda's work ethic, we braced ourselves for a storm of expectations and expected our calm to vanish as Term 1 began.

However, our first consultation proved otherwise. There was a mutual sense of belonging and a vibe that captivated our team. Ironically, not even a quarter of the way through the term, an unmistakable comfort settled in —a feeling we had only ever felt with Sir Inson. It swept through each of us like a rollercoaster, yet there were no loud discussions or overreactions—just a quiet knowing that we were about to have a meaningful journey with a research adviser who would truly support us and vibe us as we are.

From the beginning of our research journey together, I expected an inexplicable pressure that would, I thought, surround our team. As I scrolled through the details, I saw "De La Salle University Senior High School's (DLSU SHS) Academic Coordinator for Research for the Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMSS)." In the past, working with advisers with such undeniable achievements was never easy for our team. Based on those experiences and our preconceptions of Sir Janeson Miranda's work ethic, we braced ourselves for a storm of expectations and expected our calm to vanish as Term 1 began.

We pushed through the last stretch; the final term of our senior year folded at last, and I will not take back my words—without Sir Inson's steady light we could not have reached this shore of endings and beginnings.

Thanks to you, Sir Inson, we were not merely researchers who passed milestone presentations or stood at DLSU's research congress; we became young architects of change, students who can stir the wide world at such an early age.

Red Ulsano

Before knowing that Mr. Janeson Miranda would be our research adviser, I thought that our journey for research would be filled with pressure and high expectations. Knowing his achievements and reputation, I honestly thought we would constantly feel intimidated and overwhelmed. I expected consultations to be strict and formal, and I was prepared for a challenging experience from the very beginning.

However, as the journey progressed and we got to know Sir Inson better, those expectations slowly changed. Instead of feeling pressured, our group felt supported and understood. The preconception of being challenging never left, as he challenged us to improve while still creating an environment where we felt comfortable sharing our ideas, brainstorming, asking questions, and even making mistakes. Through his guidance, research no longer felt a source of pressure but became a meaningful learning experience. Every consultation became an opportunity to always think outside the box, to refine and grind our work, and grow not only as researchers but also as individuals. Looking back, I can confidently say that this journey would not have been the same without his patience, support, and genuine commitment to help us with our research endeavors.

Toby Ifurung

MIRANDA

Sir Inson was the research adviser we never knew we wanted. Upon seeing that he was the Academic Coordinator of HUMSS Research, we initially surmised that he would have unreachable standards and a terror-esque aura surrounding him, but we would soon be met with surprise. When we had met him during our first online consultation, we were met with a somewhat sassy yet warm personality in the form of a humble linguistics teacher whom we were eager to form a closer bond with. And thus, the gymbros were formed.

Fast-forward to the present day, with our thinning hair and eyes that lack who knows how much sleep. After all the ups and downs with each other—from the light and easy conceptualization stage, to the sleepless nights of data collection and the fun side quests that accompanied it, and then the countless "last" pushes in cramming "final" revisions last-minute—our priorities have now shifted a little away from research, but the ember of camaraderie that has been burning between our group and Sir Inson since the day we met still burns strong. He was the polaris to our research. The mind that thought of the unthinkable. The hopeful visionary who gave us the wings to fly sky high with our research.

As the plants of our research have now bloomed into fruition, I look back and see our research adviser—an academic, a poet, an artist—a man full of dreams.

Yanni Dungca

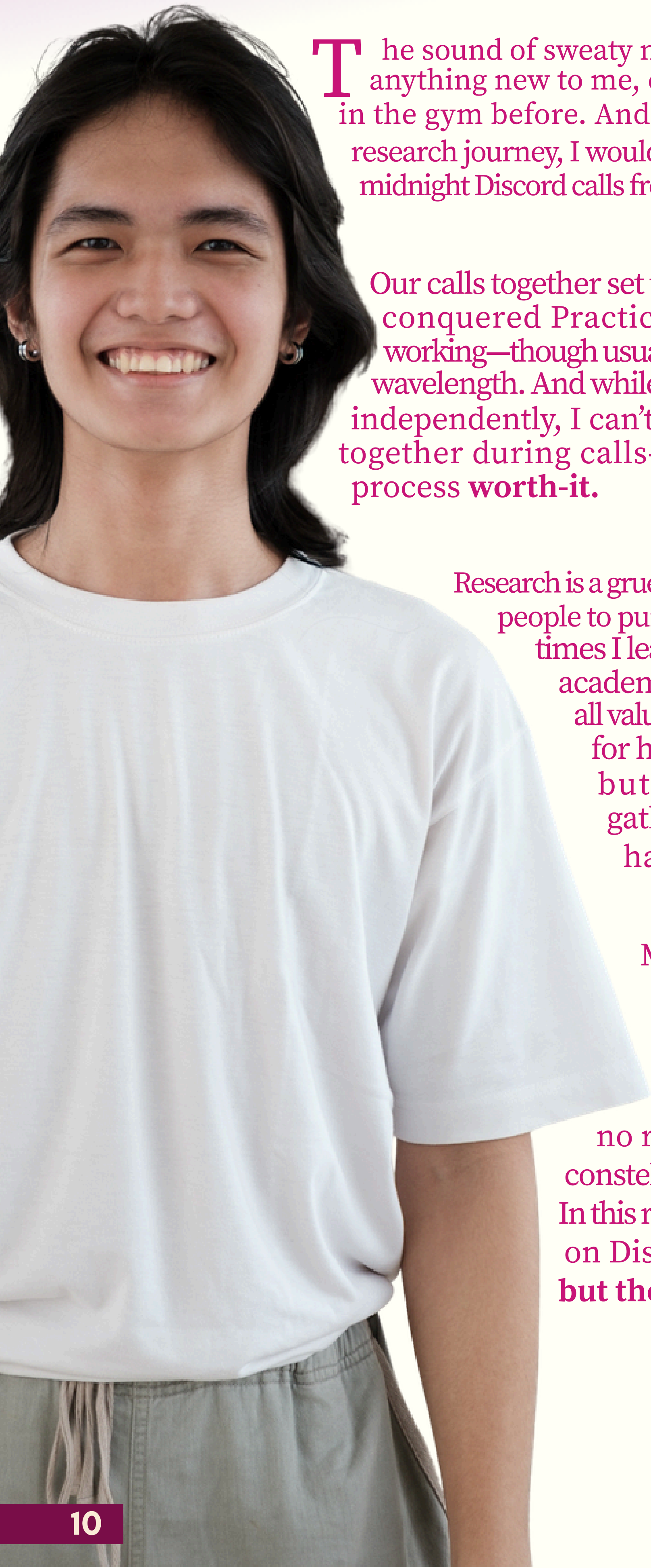
During the dawn of our first Practical Research course, when we naively believed we would have the freedom to choose our own adviser, we were met instead with an email from Dr. Christian Gopez informing us otherwise. Our adviser would be the Coordinator for HUMSS Research himself. I remember scouring through Facebook pages and department posts, piecing together a picture of this person who would be guiding us through what felt, at the time, like the most daunting thing we had ever signed up for.

And we could not have asked for anyone better. Sir Janeson did not just advise this study. He shaped the way we thought about it, pushed us to ask harder questions when we were tempted to take the easier path, and held the vision of this research steady even when we could no longer see it clearly ourselves. He sat with us through the difficult revisions, the moments of self-doubt, and the stretches where the finish line felt impossibly far, and he never once made us feel like we were failing.

What began as a name in an unexpected email became one of the most cherished relationships that we will ever have. For that, there are not enough pages in any journal to fully express our gratitude.

Kristan Gomez

Member's Corner



The sound of sweaty men grunting and making weird noises isn't anything new to me, especially as someone who had spent years in the gym before. And who knew that, for my senior high school research journey, I would continue hearining these sounds in countless midnight Discord calls from my research groupmates for months on end.

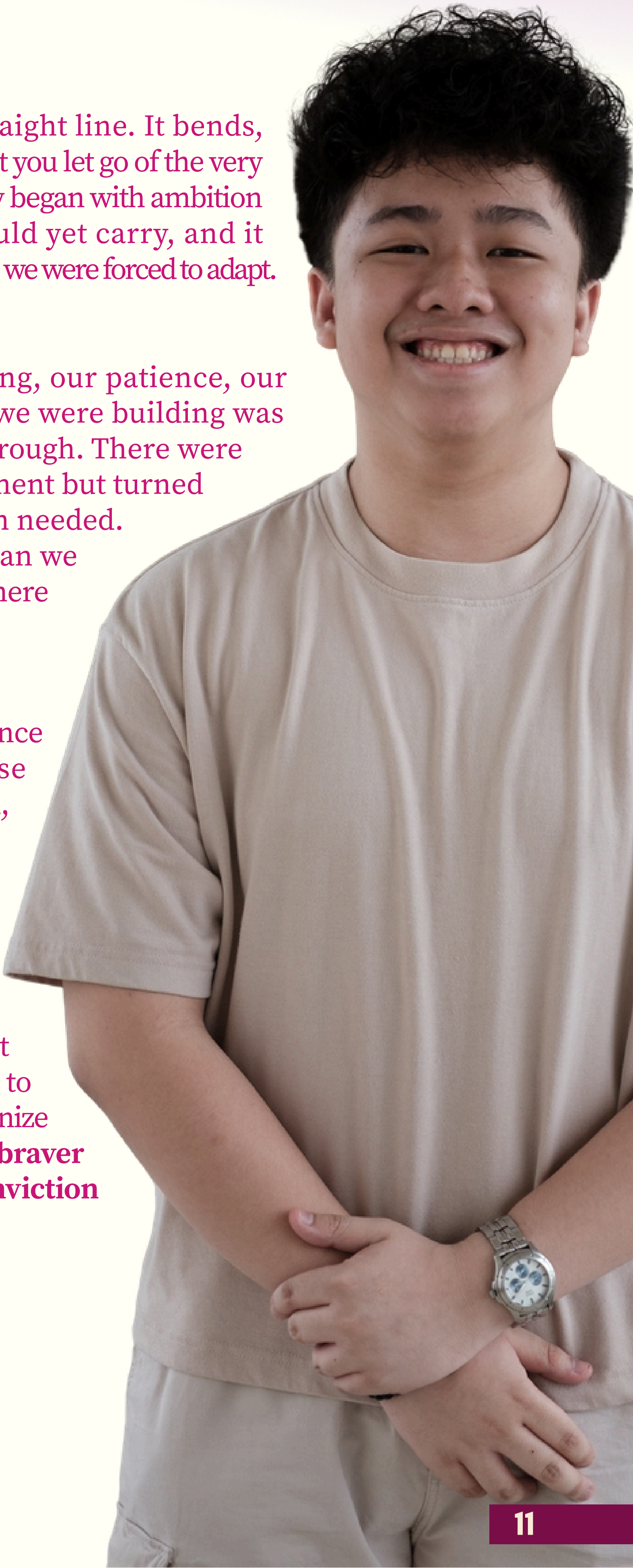
Our calls together set the stage for how we worked and eventually conquered Practical Research. No matter when we were working—though usually in the evening, we were always on the same wavelength. And while most of our work got done when we worked independently, I can't deny that we made countless memories together during calls—countless hours that made the whole process **worth-it.**

Research is a grueling process, but with the right topic and the right people to pursue it with, it's all more rewarding. Yes, all the times I learned about formatting references, writing an academic tone, and interviewing for research were all valuable lessons. They gave me a strong foundation for how I see the world and how I write about it, but the most important findings I had gathered weren't the data; it was the bonds I had nurtured along the way.

My friends and I are all pretty solid at what we individually do, and we share the same initiative and sense of responsibility when working in groups. I would say that we're all stars in our own stories, and I'm happy to have no regrets about being part of such a bright constellation in a sky full of Lasallians researchers. In this research journey, I wouldn't have chosen to stay on Discord calls at midnight with anyone else **but the three of you.**

Yanni Dungca
@_kneeya

Member's Corner



Research, I have learned, is never a straight line. It bends, backtracks, and sometimes demands that you let go of the very thing you worked hardest to build. Our journey began with ambition and ideas bigger than our experience could yet carry, and it was shaped, more than anything, by the moments we were forced to adapt.

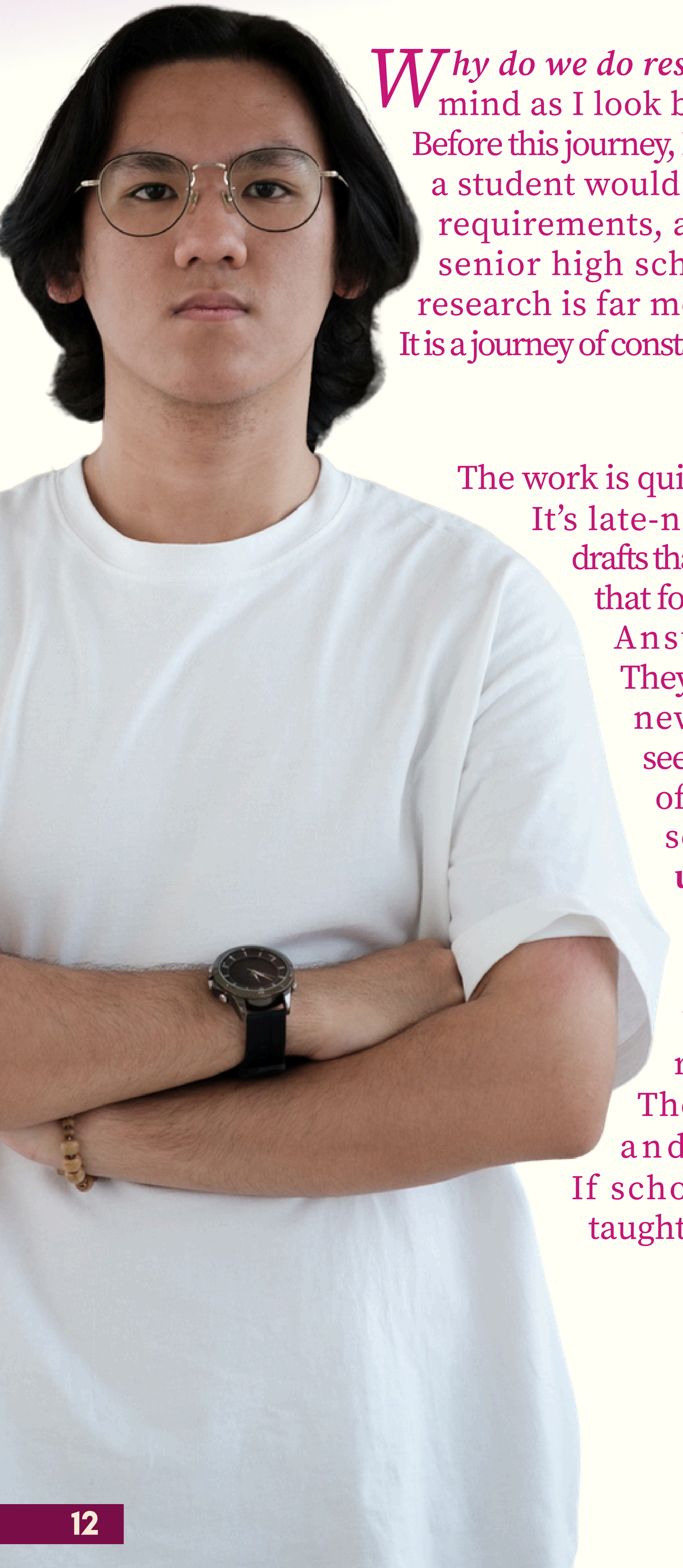
There were stretches that tested everything, our patience, our confidence, and our belief that the study we were building was worth all the difficulty it was putting us through. There were decisions that felt like setbacks in the moment but turned out to be the very redirections the research needed. There were nights that demanded more than we thought we had left to give, and mornings where we showed up anyway.

What carried us through was never the absence of obstacles. It was the refusal to let those obstacles become the ending. Every revision, every challenge, and every hard call we made along the way was quitely shaping the study into something stronger than what we had originally imagined.

This research taught me that resilience is not simply pushing through. It is knowing when to pivot, step back, and having the clarity to recognize that change is not failure. It is the **smarter**, **braver** form of persistence, and it is the kind of **conviction** that carries a study all the way to its finish.

Kristan Gomez
@zemoggss

Member's Corner



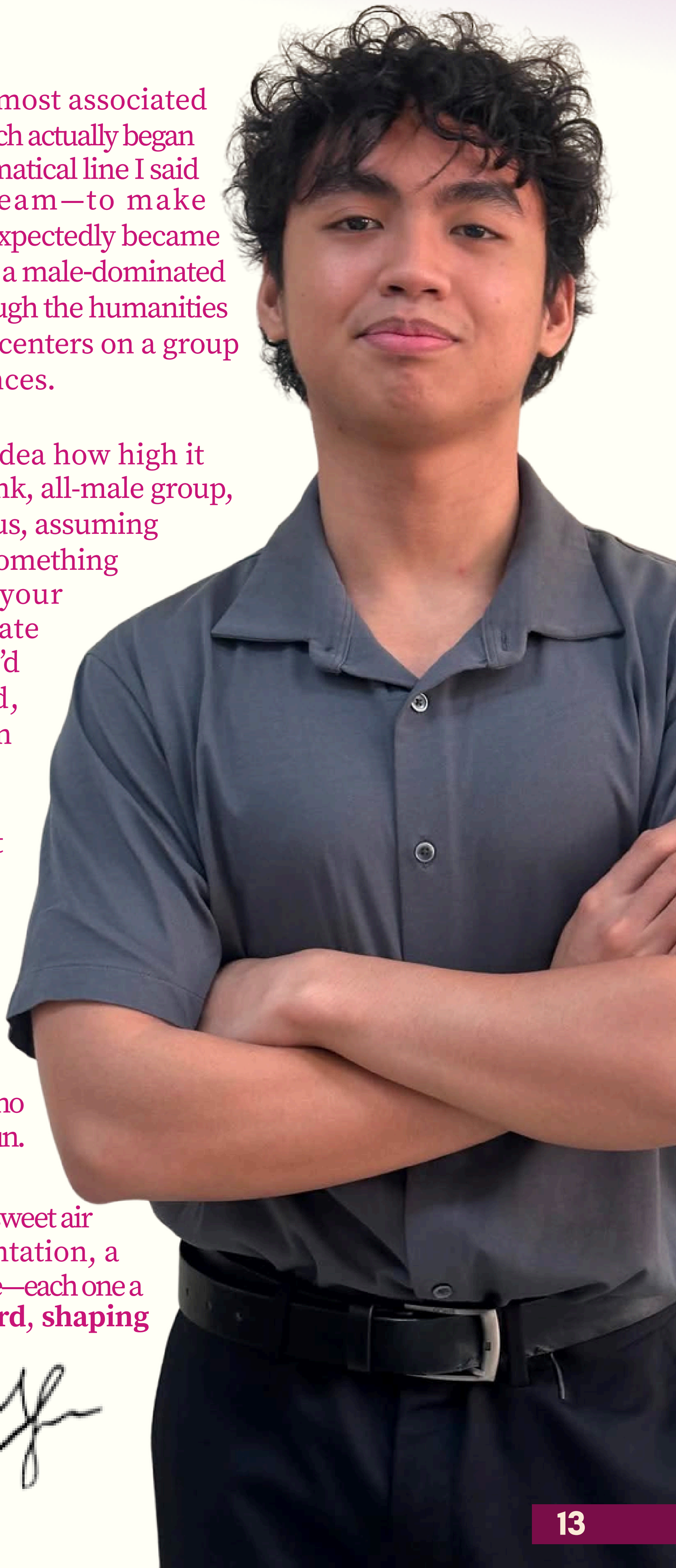
Why do we do research? This question lingers in my mind as I look back on everything we went through Before this journey, I would have answered it with something a student would usually say: to pass the subject, for requirements, and to graduate. But after 2 years in senior high school with a research-heavy strand, research is far more than an academic requirement. It is a journey of constants: learning, unlearning, and improving.

The work is quieter and lonelier than people imagine It's late-night revisions that blur into dawn, drafts that need another revision and consultations that force you to rethink your decisions in life. Answer rarely land like knockouts. They arrive as nudges that push you toward new questions. Every solved problem seems to open two new ones. But that's part of the point. Research trains you not to settle for the obvious but to sit with **uncertainty**, test it, and follow where evidence and curiosity leads.

What remains, after the confusion and the revisions, is a strange kind of confidence. The humility to admit you don't know and the patience to dive deeper. If school taught me to **study**, research taught me how to stay **curious**.

Toby Ifurung
*@_tobygonzales_*

Member's Corner



In our team, I'm probably the person most associated with the idea of "gym." Frankly, our research actually began as a joke: *"I go gym,"* a deliberately ungrammatical line I said to my friends—alias my research team—to make them laugh. That throwaway moment unexpectedly became the seed of our project. And so here we are: a male-dominated team investigating fitness scholarship through the humanities with a twist—ironically, our perspective centers on a group none of us belong to: women's experiences.

As our research took flight, we had no idea how high it would carry us. We were officially that pink, all-male group, and people would immediately question us, assuming we needed defending; the question was something like and always, "How do you ensure your women-experience findings are accurate considering you're an all-male group?" We'd answer with the line we'd rehearsed, because that was ultimately the biggest question we faced as a research team.

Yes, our plane successfully took off, but we still had to navigate the challenges ahead to avoid crashing. I remember countless all-nighters, late-night video calls, and intense conceptual work on results and discussions so our scholarship could push through—all driven by our fervor for improving women's sectors. Even so, good thing we had such a vibey adviser, Janeson Miranda, who kept us motivated and made the whole process fun.

With that chapter closed, we breathed in the sweet air of accomplishment. A milestone presentation, a finished paper, a moment on the congress stage—each one a quiet proof that our work **ripples outward**, **shaping change beyond ourselves.**

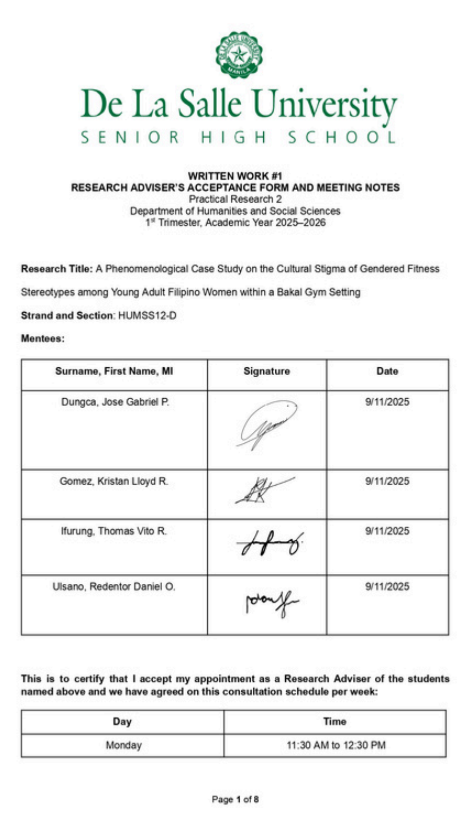
Red Ulsano
@redndqn

SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL
DE LA SALLE
THE ANIMO
In pursuit of truth
PRESS
VIETNAMESE FOOD
GYM

YUCHENGCO HALL
DE LA SALLE UNIVERSITY
LASALLIAN ACHIEVERS FOR GOD AND COUNTRY
DLSU
Exploring Cultural and Gender
DE LA SALLE UNI
GH SCHOOL
DLSU

Adviser's Acceptance Form

Access it here!



De La Salle University
SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

WRITTEN WORK #1
RESEARCH ADVISER'S ACCEPTANCE FORM AND MEETING NOTES
Practical Research 2
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
1st Trimester, Academic Year 2025–2026

Research Title: A Phenomenological Case Study on the Cultural Stigma of Gendered Fitness Stereotypes among Young Adult Filipino Women within a Bakal Gym Setting

Strand and Section: HUMSS12-D

Mentees:

Surname, First Name, MI	Signature	Date
Dungca, Jose Gabriel P.		9/11/2025
Gomez, Kristan Lloyd R.		9/11/2025
Ifurung, Thomas Vito R.		9/11/2025
Ulsano, Redentor Daniel O.		9/11/2025

This is to certify that I accept my appointment as a Research Adviser of the students named above and we have agreed on this consultation schedule per week:

Day	Time
Monday	11:30 AM to 12:30 PM

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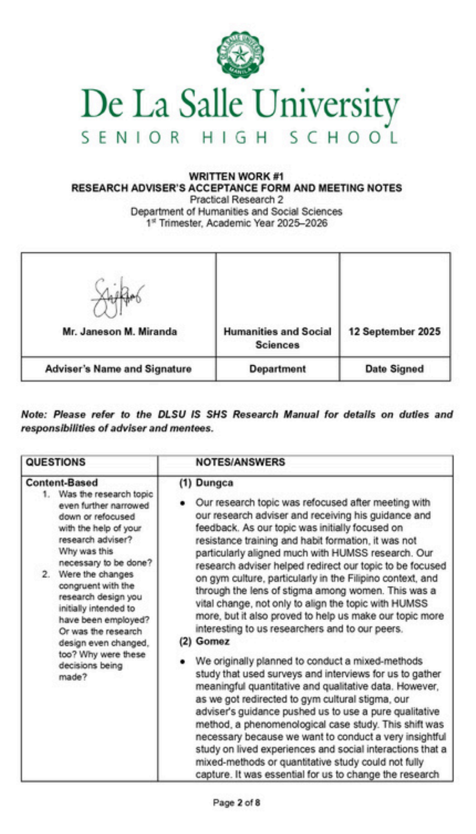

De La Salle University
SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

WRITTEN WORK #1
RESEARCH ADVISER'S ACCEPTANCE FORM AND MEETING NOTES
Practical Research 2
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
1st Trimester, Academic Year 2025–2026

Mr. Janeson M. Miranda	**Humanities and Social Sciences**	**12 September 2025**
Adviser's Name and Signature	**Department**	**Date Signed**

Note: Please refer to the DLSU IS SHS Research Manual for details on duties and responsibilities of adviser and mentees.

QUESTIONS	NOTES/ANSWERS
Content-Based 1. Was the research topic even further narrowed down or refocused with the help of your research adviser? Why was this necessary to be done? 2. Were the changes congruent with the research design you initially intended to have been employed? Or was the research design even changed, too? Why were these decisions being made?	**(1) Dungca** • Our research topic was refocused after meeting with our research adviser and receiving his guidance and feedback. As our topic was initially focused on resistance training and habit formation, it was not particularly aligned much with HUMSS research. Our research adviser helped redirect our topic to be focused on gym culture, particularly in the Filipino context, and through the lens of stigma among women. This was a vital change, not only to align the topic with HUMSS more, but it also proved to help us make our topic more interesting to us researchers and to our peers. **(2) Gomez** • We originally planned to conduct a mixed-methods study that used surveys and interviews for us to gather meaningful quantitative and qualitative data. However, as we got redirected to gym cultural stigma, our adviser's guidance pushed us to use a pure qualitative method, a phenomenological case study. This shift was necessary because we want to conduct a very insightful study on lived experiences and social interactions that a mixed-methods or quantitative study could not fully capture. It was essential for us to change the research

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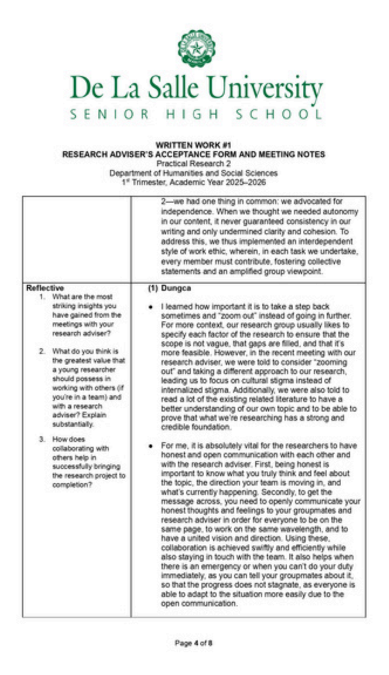
Meeting Notes



De La Salle University
SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

WRITTEN WORK #1
RESEARCH ADVISER'S ACCEPTANCE FORM AND MEETING NOTES
Practical Research 2
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
1st Trimester, Academic Year 2025–2026

	2—we had one thing in common: we advocated for independence. When we thought we needed autonomy in our content, it never guaranteed consistency in our writing and only undermined clarity and cohesion. To address this, we thus implemented an interdependent style of work ethic, wherein, in each task we undertake, every member must contribute, fostering collective statements and an amplified group viewpoint.
Reflective 1. What are the most striking insights you have gained from the meetings with your research adviser? 2. What do you think is the greatest value that a young researcher should possess in working with others (if you're in a team) and with a research adviser? Explain substantially. 3. How does collaborating with others help in successfully bringing the research project to completion?	**(1) Dungca** • I learned how important it is to take a step back sometimes and "zoom out" instead of going in further. For more context, our research group usually likes to specify each factor of the research to ensure that the scope is not vague, that gaps are filled, and that it's more feasible. However, in the recent meeting with our research adviser, we were told to consider "zooming out" and taking a different approach to our research, leading us to focus on cultural stigma instead of internalized stigma. Additionally, we were also told to read a lot of the existing related literature to have a better understanding of our own topic and to be able to prove that what we're researching has a strong and credible foundation. • For me, it is absolutely vital for the researchers to have honest and open communication with each other and with the research adviser. First, being honest is important to know what you truly think and feel about the topic, the direction your team is moving in, and what's currently happening. Secondly, to get the message across, you need to openly communicate your honest thoughts and feelings to your groupmates and research adviser in order for everyone to be on the same page, to work on the same wavelength, and to have a united vision and direction. Using these, collaboration is achieved swiftly and efficiently while also staying in touch with the team. It also helps when there is an emergency or when you can't do your duty immediately, as you can tell your groupmates about it, so that the progress does not stagnate, as everyone is able to adapt to the situation more easily due to the open communication.

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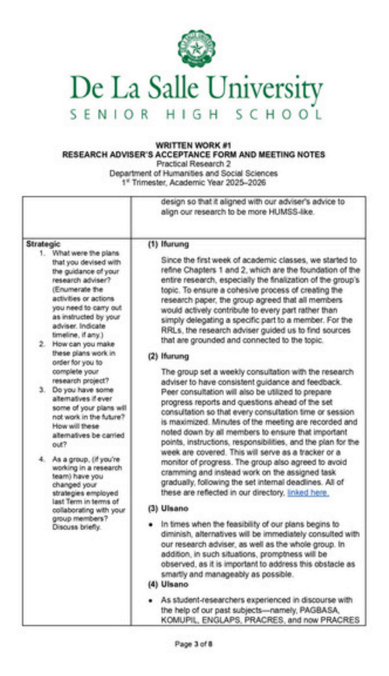


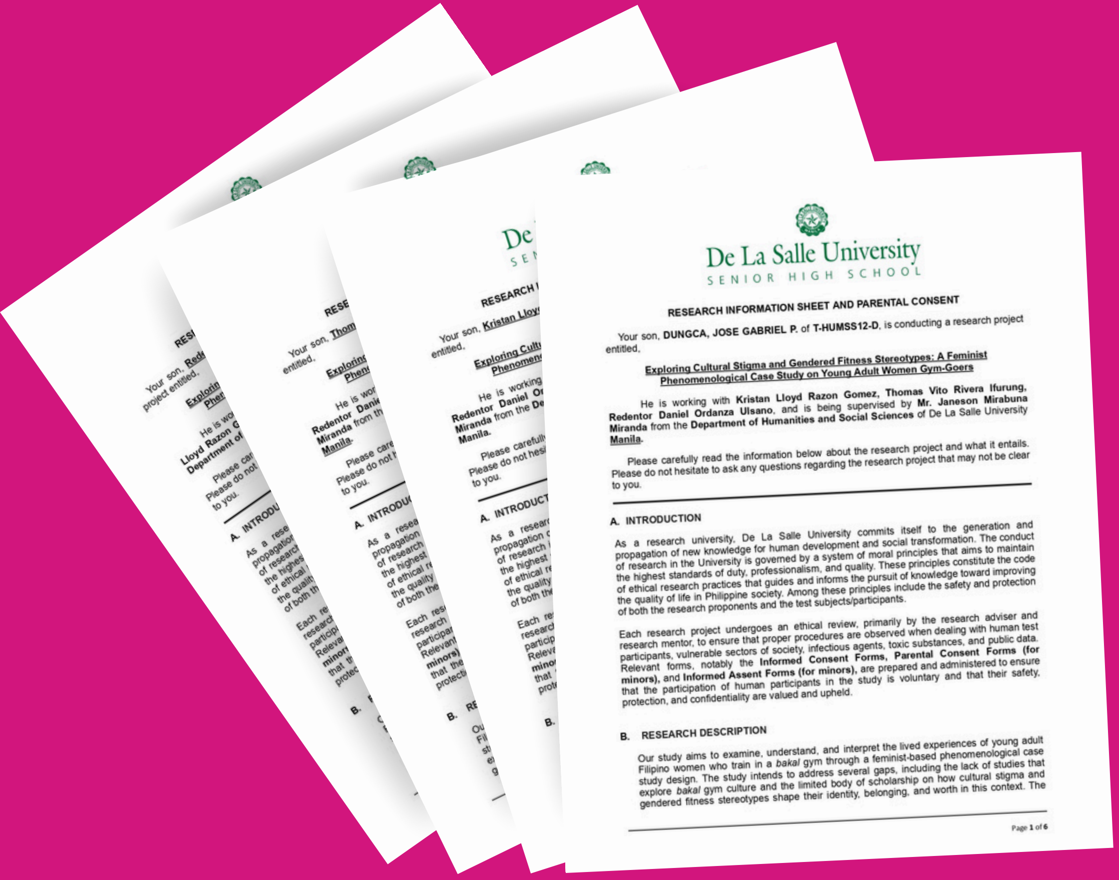
De La Salle University
SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

WRITTEN WORK #1
RESEARCH ADVISER'S ACCEPTANCE FORM AND MEETING NOTES
Practical Research 2
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
1st Trimester, Academic Year 2025–2026

	design so that it aligned with our adviser's advice to align our research to be more HUMSS-like.
Strategic 1. What were the plans that you devised with the guidance of your research adviser? (Enumerate the activities or actions you need to carry out as instructed by your adviser. Indicate timeline, if any.) 2. How can you make these plans work in order for you to complete your research project? 3. Do you have some alternatives if ever some of your plans will not work in the future? How will these alternatives be carried out? 4. As a group, (if you're working in a research team) have you changed your strategies employed last Term in terms of collaborating with your group members? Discuss briefly.	**(1) Ifurung** Since the first week of academic classes, we started to refine Chapters 1 and 2, which are the foundation of the entire research, especially the finalization of the group's topic. To ensure a cohesive process of creating the research paper, the group agreed that all members would actively contribute to every part rather than simply delegating a specific part to a member. For the RRLs, the research adviser guided us to find sources that are grounded and connected to the topic. **(2) Ifurung** The group set a weekly consultation with the research adviser to have consistent guidance and feedback. Peer consultation will also be utilized to prepare progress reports and questions ahead of the set consultation so that every consultation time or session is maximized. Minutes of the meeting are recorded and noted down by all members to ensure that important points, instructions, responsibilities, and the plan for the week are covered. This will serve as a tracker or a monitor of progress. The group also agreed to avoid cramming and instead work on the assigned task gradually, following the set internal deadlines. All of these are reflected in our directory, linked here. **(3) Ulsano** • In times when the feasibility of our plans begins to diminish, alternatives will be immediately consulted with our research adviser, as well as the whole group. In addition, in such situations, promptness will be observed, as it is important to address this obstacle as smartly and manageably as possible. **(4) Ulsano** • As student-researchers experienced in discourse with the help of our past subjects—namely, PAGBASA, KOMUPIL, ENGLAPS, PRACRES, and now PRACRES

Page 3 of 8

Information Sheet and Parental Consent Form



De La Salle University
SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

RESEARCH INFORMATION SHEET AND PARENTAL CONSENT

Your son, **DUNGCA, JOSE GABRIEL P.** of **T-HUMSS12-D**, is conducting a research project entitled,

Exploring Cultural Stigma and Gendered Fitness Stereotypes: A Feminist Phenomenological Case Study on Young Adult Women Gym-Goers

He is working with **Kristan Lloyd Razon Gomez, Thomas Vito Rivera Ifurung, Redentor Daniel Ordanza Ulsano**, and is being supervised by **Mr. Janeson Mirabuna Miranda** from the **Department of Humanities and Social Sciences** of De La Salle University **Manila**.

Please carefully read the information below about the research project and what it entails. Please do not hesitate to ask any questions regarding the research project that may not be clear to you.

A. INTRODUCTION

As a research university, De La Salle University commits itself to the generation and propagation of new knowledge for human development and social transformation. The conduct of research in the University is governed by a system of moral principles that aims to maintain the highest standards of duty, professionalism, and quality. These principles constitute the code of ethical research practices that guides and informs the pursuit of knowledge toward improving the quality of life in Philippine society. Among these principles include the safety and protection of both the research proponents and the test subjects/participants.

Each research project undergoes an ethical review, primarily by the research adviser and research mentor, to ensure that proper procedures are observed when dealing with human test participants, vulnerable sectors of society, infectious agents, toxic substances, and public data. Relevant forms, notably the **Informed Consent Forms, Parental Consent Forms (for minors)**, and **Informed Assent Forms (for minors)**, are prepared and administered to ensure that the participation of human participants in the study is voluntary and that their safety, protection, and confidentiality are valued and upheld.

B. RESEARCH DESCRIPTION

Our study aims to examine, understand, and interpret the lived experiences of young adult Filipino women who train in a *bakal* gym through a feminist-based phenomenological case study design. The study intends to address several gaps, including the lack of studies that explore *bakal* gym culture and the limited body of scholarship on how cultural stigma and gendered fitness stereotypes shape their identity, belonging, and worth in this context. The

Page 1 of 6

Access it here!

Revised Ethics Clearance Form

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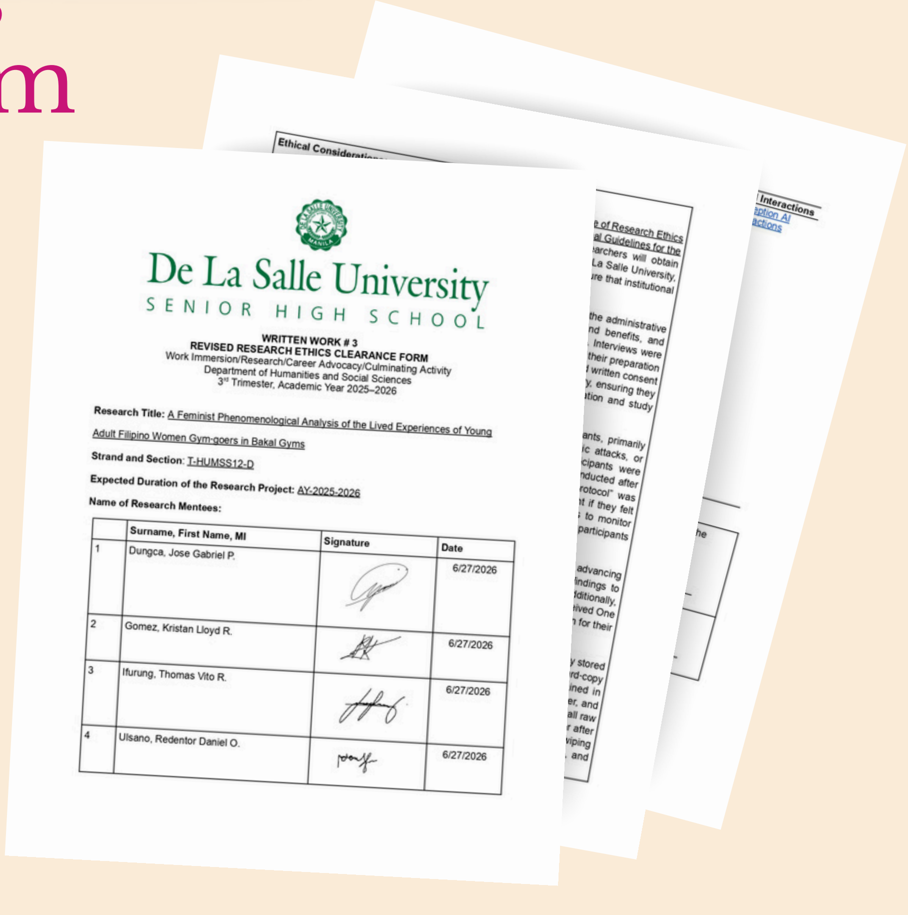

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WRITTEN WORK # 3
REVISED RESEARCH ETHICS CLEARANCE FORM
Work Immersion/Research/Career Advocacy/Culminating Activity
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
3rd Trimester, Academic Year 2025–2026

Research Title: A Feminist Phenomenological Analysis of the Lived Experiences of Young Adult Filipino Women Gym-goers in Bakal Gyms

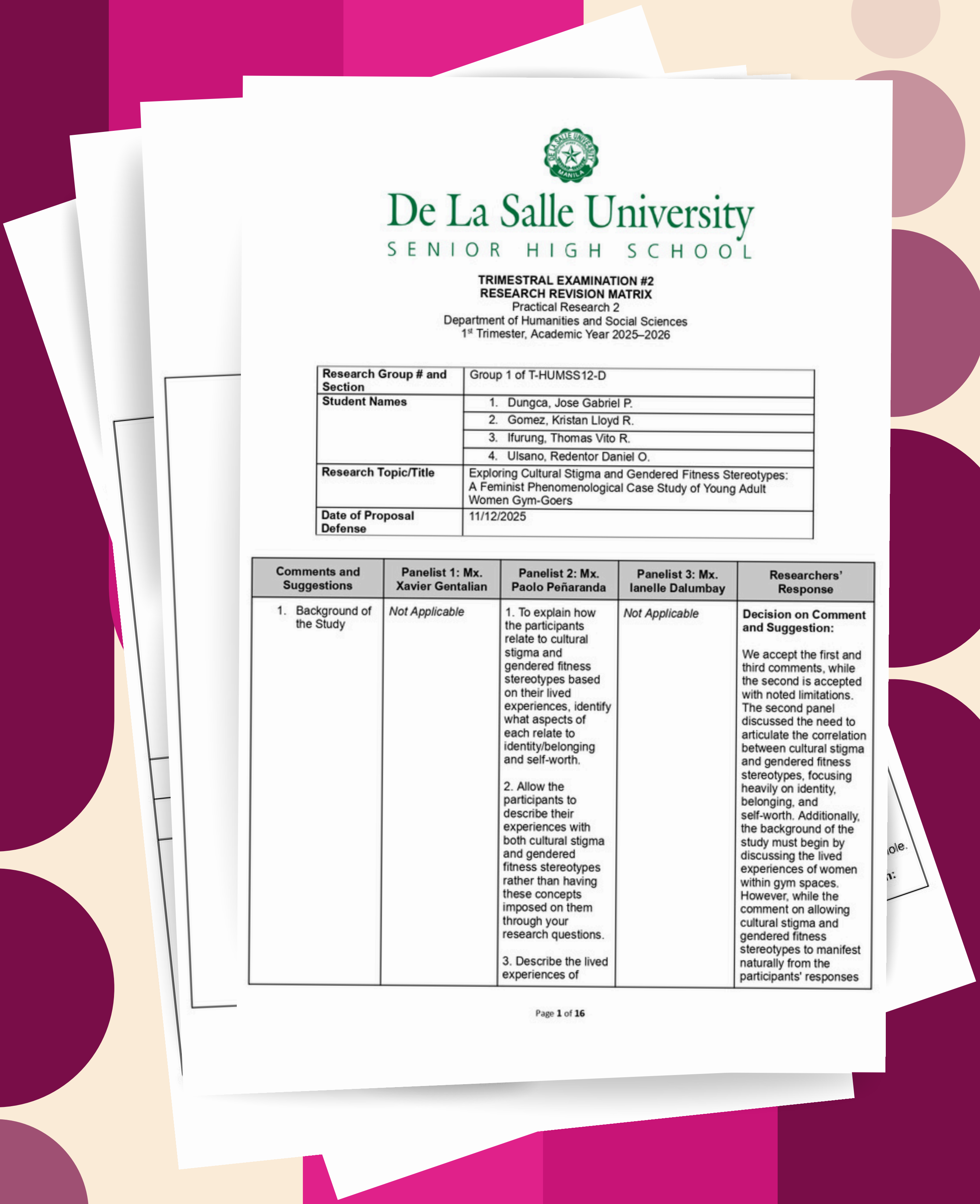
Strand and Section: T-HUMSS12-D

Expected Duration of the Research Project: AY-2025-2026

Name of Research Mentees:

	Surname, First Name, MI	**Signature**	**Date**
1	Dungca, Jose Gabriel P.		6/27/2026
2	Gomez, Kristan Lloyd R.		6/27/2026
3	Ifurung, Thomas Vito R.		6/27/2026
4	Ulsano, Redentor Daniel O.		6/27/2026

Revision Matrix



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TRIMESTRAL EXAMINATION #2
RESEARCH REVISION MATRIX
Practical Research 2
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
1st Trimester, Academic Year 2025–2026

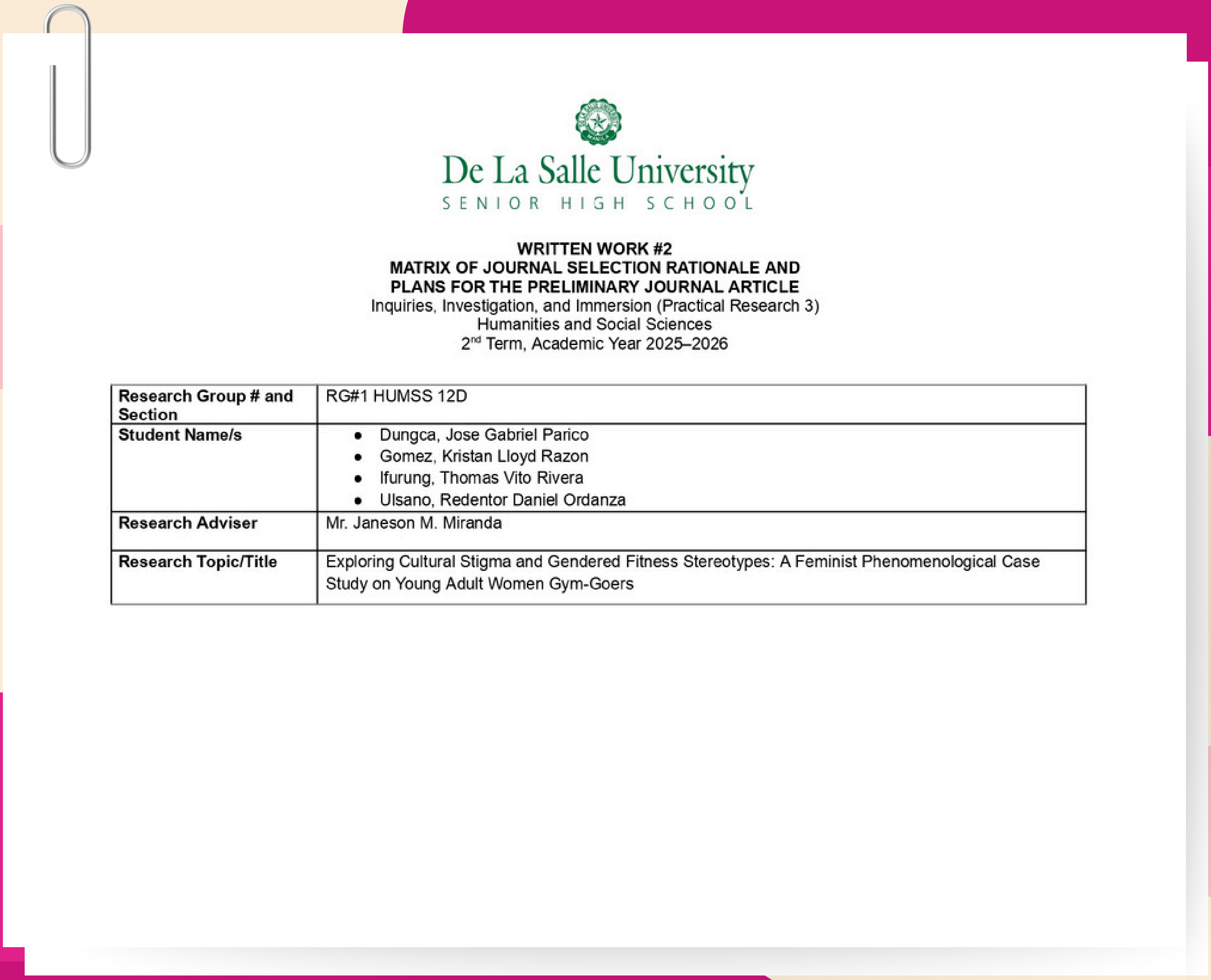
Research Group # and Section	Group 1 of T-HUMSS12-D
Student Names	1. Dungca, Jose Gabriel P.
	2. Gomez, Kristan Lloyd R.
	3. Ifurung, Thomas Vito R.
	4. Ulsano, Redentor Daniel O.
Research Topic/Title	Exploring Cultural Stigma and Gendered Fitness Stereotypes: A Feminist Phenomenological Case Study of Young Adult Women Gym-Goers
Date of Proposal Defense	11/12/2025

Comments and Suggestions	**Panelist 1: Mx. Xavier Gentalian**	**Panelist 2: Mx. Paolo Peñaranda**	**Panelist 3: Mx. Ianelle Dalumbay**	**Researchers' Response**
1. Background of the Study	*Not Applicable*	1. To explain how the participants relate to cultural stigma and gendered fitness stereotypes based on their lived experiences, identify what aspects of each relate to identity/belonging and self-worth. 2. Allow the participants to describe their experiences with both cultural stigma and gendered fitness stereotypes rather than having these concepts imposed on them through your research questions. 3. Describe the lived experiences of	*Not Applicable*	**Decision on Comment and Suggestion:** We accept the first and third comments, while the second is accepted with noted limitations. The second panel discussed the need to articulate the correlation between cultural stigma and gendered fitness stereotypes, focusing heavily on identity, belonging, and self-worth. Additionally, the background of the study must begin by discussing the lived experiences of women within gym spaces. However, while the comment on allowing cultural stigma and gendered fitness stereotypes to manifest naturally from the participants' responses

Page 1 of 16

Access it here!

Matrix of Journal Selection Rationale



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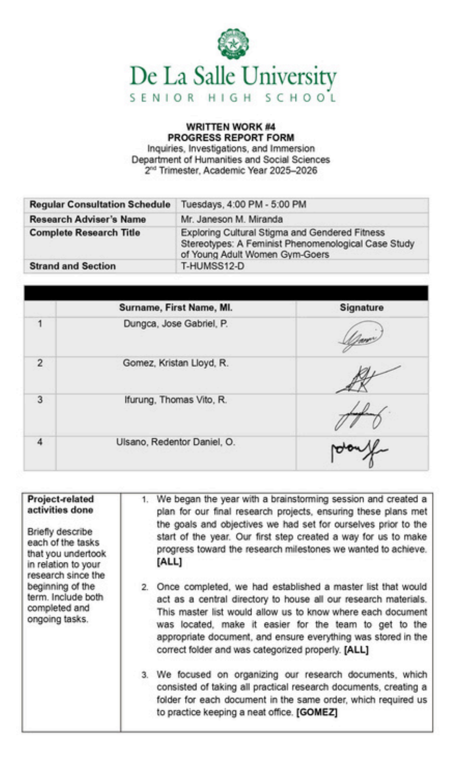
WRITTEN WORK #2
MATRIX OF JOURNAL SELECTION RATIONALE AND PLANS FOR THE PRELIMINARY JOURNAL ARTICLE
Inquiries, Investigation, and Immersion (Practical Research 3)
Humanities and Social Sciences
2nd Term, Academic Year 2025–2026

Research Group # and Section	RG#1 HUMSS 12D
Student Name/s	• Dungca, Jose Gabriel Parico • Gomez, Kristan Lloyd Razon • Ifurung, Thomas Vito Rivera • Ulsano, Redentor Daniel Ordanza
Research Adviser	Mr. Janeson M. Miranda
Research Topic/Title	Exploring Cultural Stigma and Gendered Fitness Stereotypes: A Feminist Phenomenological Case Study on Young Adult Women Gym-Goers

Access it here!

PROGRESS R



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WRITTEN WORK #4
PROGRESS REPORT FORM
Inquiries, Investigations, and Immersion
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
2nd Trimester, Academic Year 2025–2026

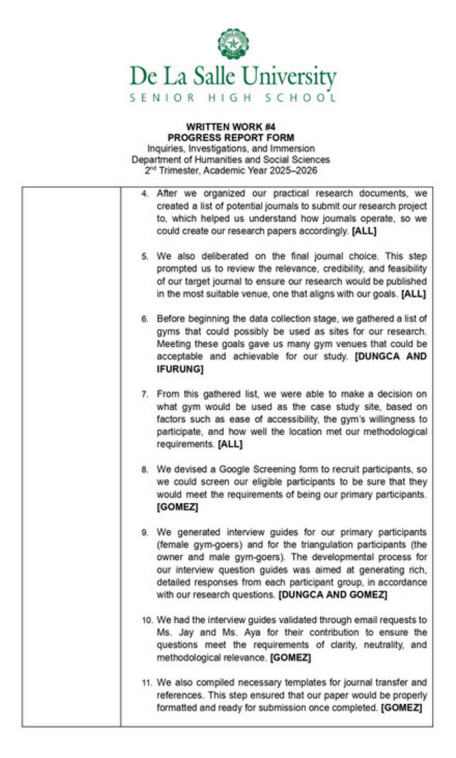
Regular Consultation Schedule	Tuesdays, 4:00 PM - 5:00 PM
Research Adviser's Name	Mr. Janeson M. Miranda
Complete Research Title	Exploring Cultural Stigma and Gendered Fitness Stereotypes: A Feminist Phenomenological Case Study of Young Adult Women Gym-Goers
Strand and Section	T-HUMSS12-D

	Surname, First Name, MI.	**Signature**
1	Dungca, Jose Gabriel, P.	
2	Gomez, Kristan Lloyd, R.	
3	Ifurung, Thomas Vito, R.	
4	Ulsano, Redentor Daniel, O.	

Project-related activities done

Briefly describe each of the tasks that you undertook in relation to your research since the beginning of the term. Include both completed and ongoing tasks.

1. We began the year with a brainstorming session and created a plan for our final research projects, ensuring these plans met the goals and objectives we had set for ourselves prior to the start of the year. Our first step created a way for us to make progress toward the research milestones we wanted to achieve. **[ALL]**
2. Once completed, we had established a master list that would act as a central directory to house all our research materials. This master list would allow us to know where each document was located, make it easier for the team to get to the appropriate document, and ensure everything was stored in the correct folder and was categorized properly. **[ALL]**
3. We focused on organizing our research documents, which consisted of taking all practical research documents, creating a folder for each document in the same order, which required us to practice keeping a neat office. **[GOMEZ]**



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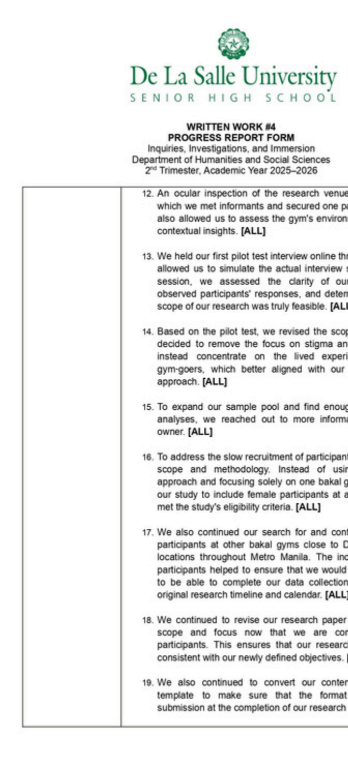
WRITTEN WORK #4
PROGRESS REPORT FORM
Inquiries, Investigations, and Immersion
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
2nd Trimester, Academic Year 2025–2026

4. After we organized our practical research documents, we created a list of potential journals to submit our research project to, which helped us understand how journals operate, so we could create our research papers accordingly. **[ALL]**
5. We also deliberated on the final journal choice. This step prompted us to review the relevance, credibility, and feasibility of our target journal to ensure our research would be published in the most suitable venue, one that aligns with our goals. **[ALL]**
6. Before beginning the data collection stage, we gathered a list of gyms that could possibly be used as sites for our research. Meeting these goals gave us many gym venues that could be acceptable and achievable for our study. **[DUNGCA AND IFURUNG]**
7. From this gathered list, we were able to make a decision on what gym would be used as the case study site, based on factors such as ease of accessibility, the gym's willingness to participate, and how well the location met our methodological requirements. **[ALL]**
8. We devised a Google Screening form to recruit participants, so we could screen our eligible participants to be sure that they would meet the requirements of being our primary participants. **[GOMEZ]**
9. We generated interview guides for our primary participants (female gym-goers) and for the triangulation participants (the owner and male gym-goers). The developmental process for our interview question guides was aimed at generating rich, detailed responses from each participant group, in accordance with our research questions. **[DUNGCA AND GOMEZ]**
10. We had the interview guides validated through email requests to Ms. Jay and Ms. Aya for their contribution to ensure the questions meet the requirements of clarity, neutrality, and methodological relevance. **[GOMEZ]**
11. We also compiled necessary templates for journal transfer and references. This step ensured that our paper would be properly formatted and ready for submission once completed. **[GOMEZ]**



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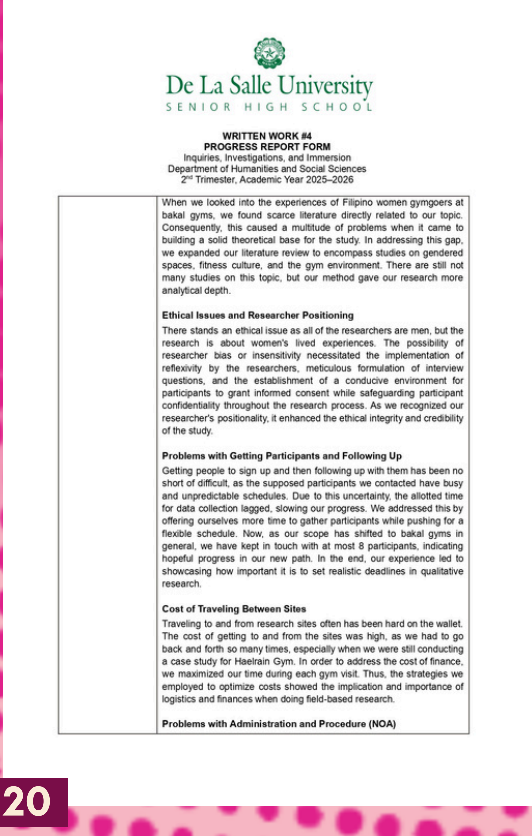
PROGRESS REPORT FORM
Inquiries, Investigations, and Immersion
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
2nd Trimester, Academic Year 2025–2026

12. An ocular inspection of the research venue
    which we met informants and secured one pa
    also allowed us to assess the gym's environ
    contextual insights. **[ALL]**
13. We held our first pilot test interview online thr
    allowed us to simulate the actual interview s
    session, we assessed the clarity of our
    observed participants' responses, and deten
    scope of our research was truly feasible. **[ALL**
14. Based on the pilot test, we revised the scop
    decided to remove the focus on stigma an
    instead concentrate on the lived experi
    gym-goers, which better aligned with our
    approach. **[ALL]**
15. To expand our sample pool and find enoug
    analyses, we reached out to more informa
    owner. **[ALL]**
16. To address the slow recruitment of participant
    scope and methodology. Instead of usin
    approach and focusing solely on one bakal g
    our study to include female participants at a
    met the study's eligibility criteria. **[ALL]**
17. We also continued our search for and cont
    participants at other bakal gyms close to D
    locations throughout Metro Manila. The inc
    participants helped to ensure that we would
    to be able to complete our data collection
    original research timeline and calendar. **[ALL]**
18. We continued to revise our research paper
    scope and focus now that we are cor
    participants. This ensures that our researc
    consistent with our newly defined objectives. **[**
19. We also continued to convert our conter
    template to make sure that the format
    submission at the completion of our research



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WRITTEN WORK #4
PROGRESS REPORT FORM
Inquiries, Investigations, and Immersion
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
2nd Trimester, Academic Year 2025–2026

When we looked into the experiences of Filipino women gymgoers at bakal gyms, we found scarce literature directly related to our topic. Consequently, this caused a multitude of problems when it came to building a solid theoretical base for the study. In addressing this gap, we expanded our literature review to encompass studies on gendered spaces, fitness culture, and the gym environment. There are still not many studies on this topic, but our method gave our research more analytical depth.

Ethical Issues and Researcher Positioning

There stands an ethical issue as all of the researchers are men, but the research is about women's lived experiences. The possibility of researcher bias or insensitivity necessitated the implementation of reflexivity by the researchers, meticulous formulation of interview questions, and the establishment of a conducive environment for participants to grant informed consent while safeguarding participant confidentiality throughout the research process. As we recognized our researcher's positionality, it enhanced the ethical integrity and credibility of the study.

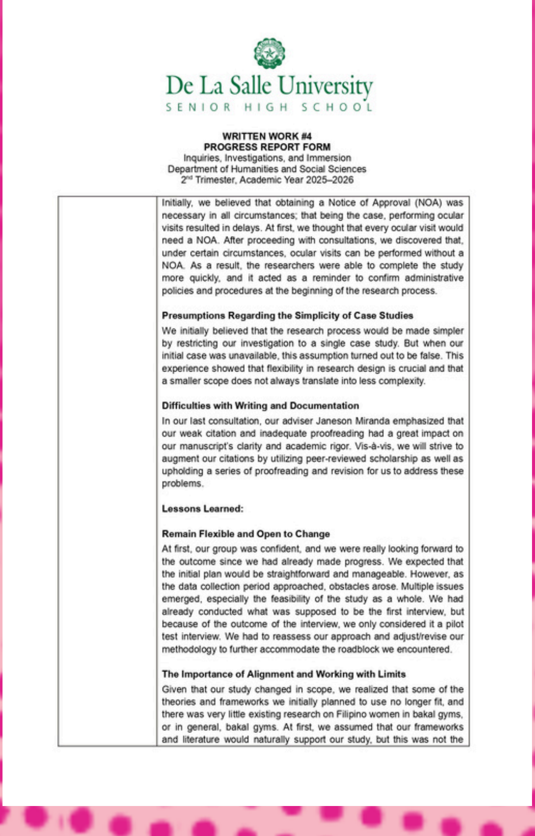
Problems with Getting Participants and Following Up

Getting people to sign up and then following up with them has been no short of difficult, as the supposed participants we contacted have busy and unpredictable schedules. Due to this uncertainty, the allotted time for data collection lagged, slowing our progress. We addressed this by offering ourselves more time to gather participants while pushing for a flexible schedule. Now, as our scope has shifted to bakal gyms in general, we have kept in touch with at most 8 participants, indicating hopeful progress in our new path. In the end, our experience led to showcasing how important it is to set realistic deadlines in qualitative research.

Cost of Traveling Between Sites

Traveling to and from research sites often has been hard on the wallet. The cost of getting to and from the sites was high, as we had to go back and forth so many times, especially when we were still conducting a case study for Haelrain Gym. In order to address the cost of finance, we maximized our time during each gym visit. Thus, the strategies we employed to optimize costs showed the implication and importance of logistics and finances when doing field-based research.

Problems with Administration and Procedure (NOA)



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WRITTEN WORK #4
PROGRESS REPORT FORM
Inquiries, Investigations, and Immersion
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
2nd Trimester, Academic Year 2025–2026

Initially, we believed that obtaining a Notice of Approval (NOA) was necessary in all circumstances; that being the case, performing ocular visits resulted in delays. At first, we thought that every ocular visit would need a NOA. After proceeding with consultations, we discovered that, under certain circumstances, ocular visits can be performed without a NOA. As a result, the researchers were able to complete the study more quickly, and it acted as a reminder to confirm administrative policies and procedures at the beginning of the research process.

Presumptions Regarding the Simplicity of Case Studies

We initially believed that the research process would be made simpler by restricting our investigation to a single case study. But when our initial case was unavailable, this assumption turned out to be false. This experience showed that flexibility in research design is crucial and that a smaller scope does not always translate into less complexity.

Difficulties with Writing and Documentation

In our last consultation, our adviser Janeson Miranda emphasized that our weak citation and inadequate proofreading had a great impact on our manuscript's clarity and academic rigor. Vis-à-vis, we will strive to augment our citations by utilizing peer-reviewed scholarship as well as upholding a series of proofreading and revision for us to address these problems.

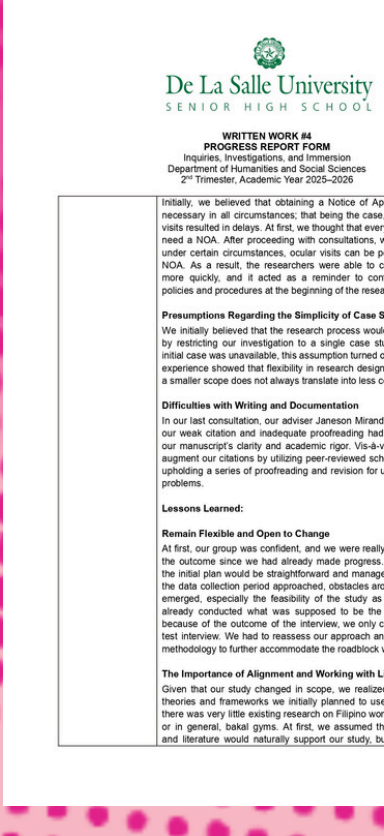
Lessons Learned:

Remain Flexible and Open to Change

At first, our group was confident, and we were really looking forward to the outcome since we had already made progress. We expected that the initial plan would be straightforward and manageable. However, as the data collection period approached, obstacles arose. Multiple issues emerged, especially the feasibility of the study as a whole. We had already conducted what was supposed to be the first interview, but because of the outcome of the interview, we only considered it a pilot test interview. We had to reassess our approach and adjust/revise our methodology to further accommodate the roadblock we encountered.

The Importance of Alignment and Working with Limits

Given that our study changed in scope, we realized that some of the theories and frameworks we initially planned to use no longer fit, and there was very little existing research on Filipino women in bakal gyms, or in general, bakal gyms. At first, we assumed that our frameworks and literature would naturally support our study, but this was not the



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WRITTEN WORK #4
PROGRESS REPORT FORM
Inquiries, Investigations, and Immersion
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
2nd Trimester, Academic Year 2025–2026

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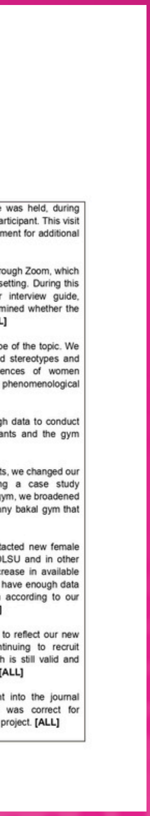

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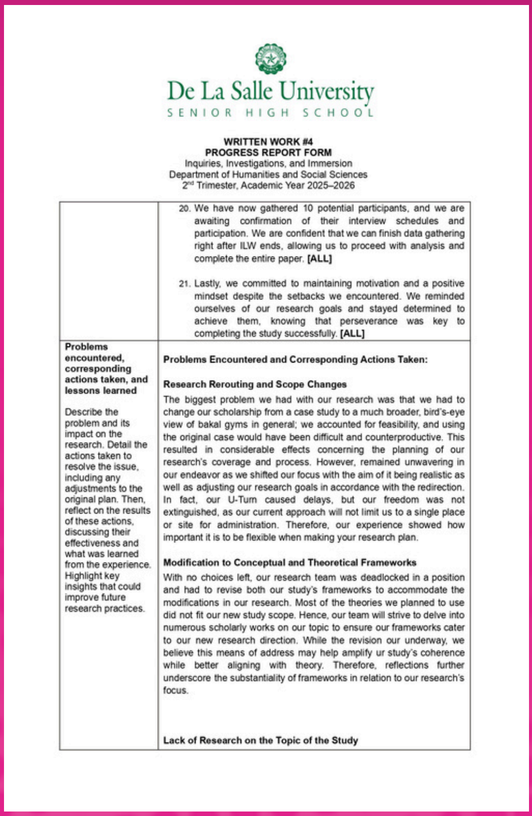
project. **[ALL]**



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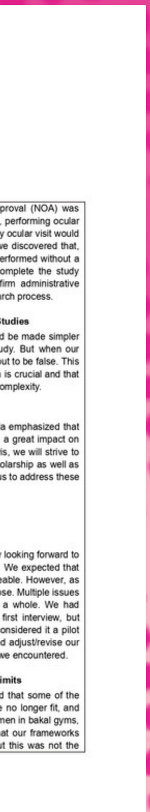
WRITTEN WORK #4
PROGRESS REPORT FORM
Inquiries, Investigations, and Immersion
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
2nd Trimester, Academic Year 2025–2026

	20. We have now gathered 10 potential participants, and we are awaiting confirmation of their interview schedules and participation. We are confident that we can finish data gathering right after ILW ends, allowing us to proceed with analysis and complete the entire paper. **[ALL]** 21. Lastly, we committed to maintaining motivation and a positive mindset despite the setbacks we encountered. We reminded ourselves of our research goals and stayed determined to achieve them, knowing that perseverance was key to completing the study successfully. **[ALL]**
Problems encountered, corresponding actions taken, and lessons learned Describe the problem and its impact on the research. Detail the actions taken to resolve the issue, including any adjustments to the original plan. Then, reflect on the results of these actions, discussing their effectiveness and what was learned from the experience. Highlight key insights that could improve future research practices.	**Problems Encountered and Corresponding Actions Taken:** **Research Rerouting and Scope Changes** The biggest problem we had with our research was that we had to change our scholarship from a case study to a much broader, bird's-eye view of bakal gyms in general; we accounted for feasibility, and using the original case would have been difficult and counterproductive. This resulted in considerable effects concerning the planning of our research's coverage and process. However, remained unwavering in our endeavor as we shifted our focus with the aim of it being realistic as well as adjusting our research goals in accordance with the redirection. In fact, our U-Turn caused delays, but our freedom was not extinguished, as our current approach will not limit us to a single place or site for administration. Therefore, our experience showed how important it is to be flexible when making your research plan. **Modification to Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks** With no choices left, our research team was deadlocked in a position and had to revise both our study's frameworks to accommodate the modifications in our research. Most of the theories we planned to use did not fit our new study scope. Hence, our team will strive to delve into numerous scholarly works on our topic to ensure our frameworks cater to our new research direction. While the revision our underway, we believe this means of address may help amplify ur study's coherence while better aligning with theory. Therefore, reflections further underscore the substantiality of frameworks in relation to our research's focus. **Lack of Research on the Topic of the Study**

[Access it here!](#)



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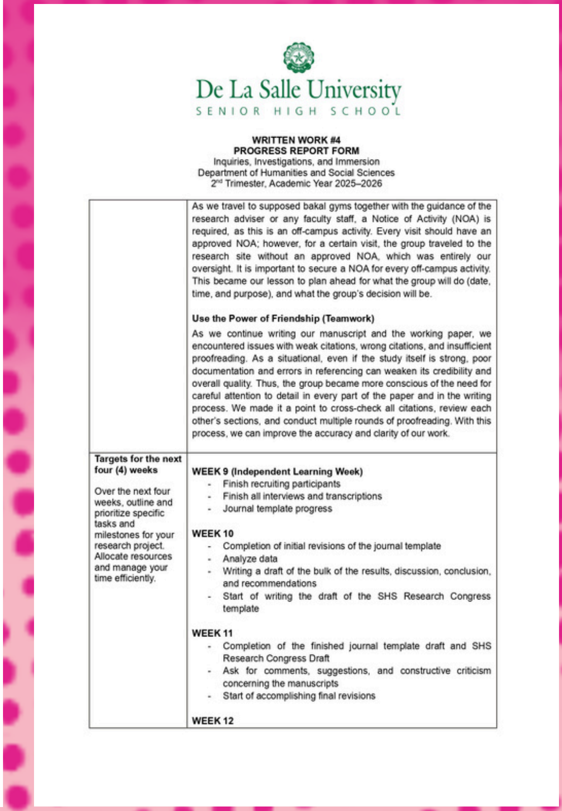

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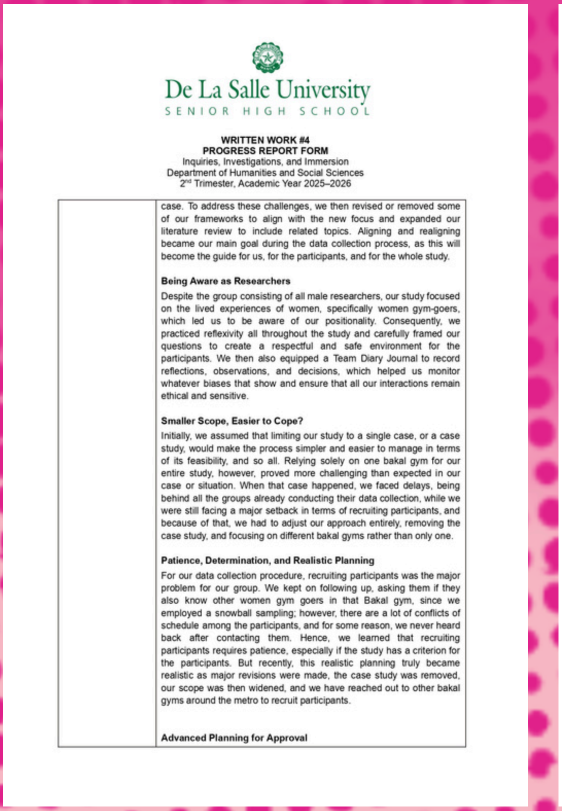
SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

WRITTEN WORK #4
PROGRESS REPORT FORM
Inquiries, Investigations, and Immersion
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
2nd Trimester, Academic Year 2025–2026

	As we travel to supposed bakal gyms together with the guidance of the research adviser or any faculty staff, a Notice of Activity (NOA) is required, as this is an off-campus activity. Every visit should have an approved NOA; however, for a certain visit, the group traveled to the research site without an approved NOA, which was entirely our oversight. It is important to secure a NOA for every off-campus activity. This became our lesson to plan ahead for what the group will do (date, time, and purpose), and what the group's decision will be. **Use the Power of Friendship (Teamwork)** As we continue writing our manuscript and the working paper, we encountered issues with weak citations, wrong citations, and insufficient proofreading. As a situational, even if the study itself is strong, poor documentation and errors in referencing can weaken its credibility and overall quality. Thus, the group became more conscious of the need for careful attention to detail in every part of the paper and in the writing process. We made it a point to cross-check all citations, review each other's sections, and conduct multiple rounds of proofreading. With this process, we can improve the accuracy and clarity of our work.
Targets for the next four (4) weeks Over the next four weeks, outline and prioritize specific tasks and milestones for your research project. Allocate resources and manage your time efficiently.	**WEEK 9 (Independent Learning Week)** - Finish recruiting participants - Finish all interviews and transcriptions - Journal template progress **WEEK 10** - Completion of initial revisions of the journal template - Analyze data - Writing a draft of the bulk of the results, discussion, conclusion, and recommendations - Start of writing the draft of the SHS Research Congress template **WEEK 11** - Completion of the finished journal template draft and SHS Research Congress Draft - Ask for comments, suggestions, and constructive criticism concerning the manuscripts - Start of accomplishing final revisions **WEEK 12**



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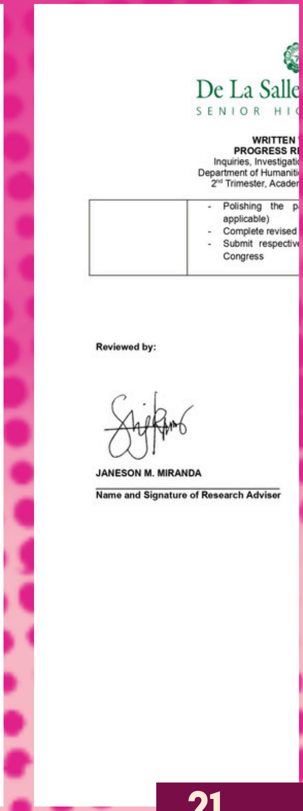
PROGRESS REPORT FORM
Inquiries, Investigations, and Immersion
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
2nd Trimester, Academic Year 2025–2026

	case. To address these challenges, we then revised or removed some of our frameworks to align with the new focus and expanded our literature review to include related topics. Aligning and realigning became our main goal during the data collection process, as this will become the guide for us, for the participants, and for the whole study. **Being Aware as Researchers** Despite the group consisting of all male researchers, our study focused on the lived experiences of women, specifically women gym-goers, which led us to be aware of our positionality. Consequently, we practiced reflexivity all throughout the study and carefully framed our questions to create a respectful and safe environment for the participants. We then also equipped a Team Diary Journal to record reflections, observations, and decisions, which helped us monitor whatever biases that show and ensure that all our interactions remain ethical and sensitive. **Smaller Scope, Easier to Cope?** Initially, we assumed that limiting our study to a single case, or a case study, would make the process simpler and easier to manage in terms of its feasibility, and so all. Relying solely on one bakal gym for our entire study, however, proved more challenging than expected in our case or situation. When that case happened, we faced delays, being behind all the groups already conducting their data collection, while we were still facing a major setback in terms of recruiting participants, and because of that, we had to adjust our approach entirely, removing the case study, and focusing on different bakal gyms rather than only one. **Patience, Determination, and Realistic Planning** For our data collection procedure, recruiting participants was the major problem for our group. We kept on following up, asking them if they also know other women gym goers in that Bakal gym, since we employed a snowball sampling; however, there are a lot of conflicts of schedule among the participants, and for some reason, we never heard back after contacting them. Hence, we learned that recruiting participants requires patience, especially if the study has a criterion for the participants. But recently, this realistic planning truly became realistic as major revisions were made, the case study was removed, our scope was then widened, and we have reached out to other bakal gyms around the metro to recruit participants. **Advanced Planning for Approval**



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Reviewed by:

JANESON M. MIRANDA

Name and Signature of Research Adviser

Proposal Defense Manuscript

De La Salle University
SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

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Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
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CONFIDENTIAL

Exploring Cultural Stigmas and Gendered Fitness Stereotypes:
A Feminist Phenomenological Case Study of Young Adult Women Gym-Goers

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Gomez, Kristan Lloyd R.
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2025-2026

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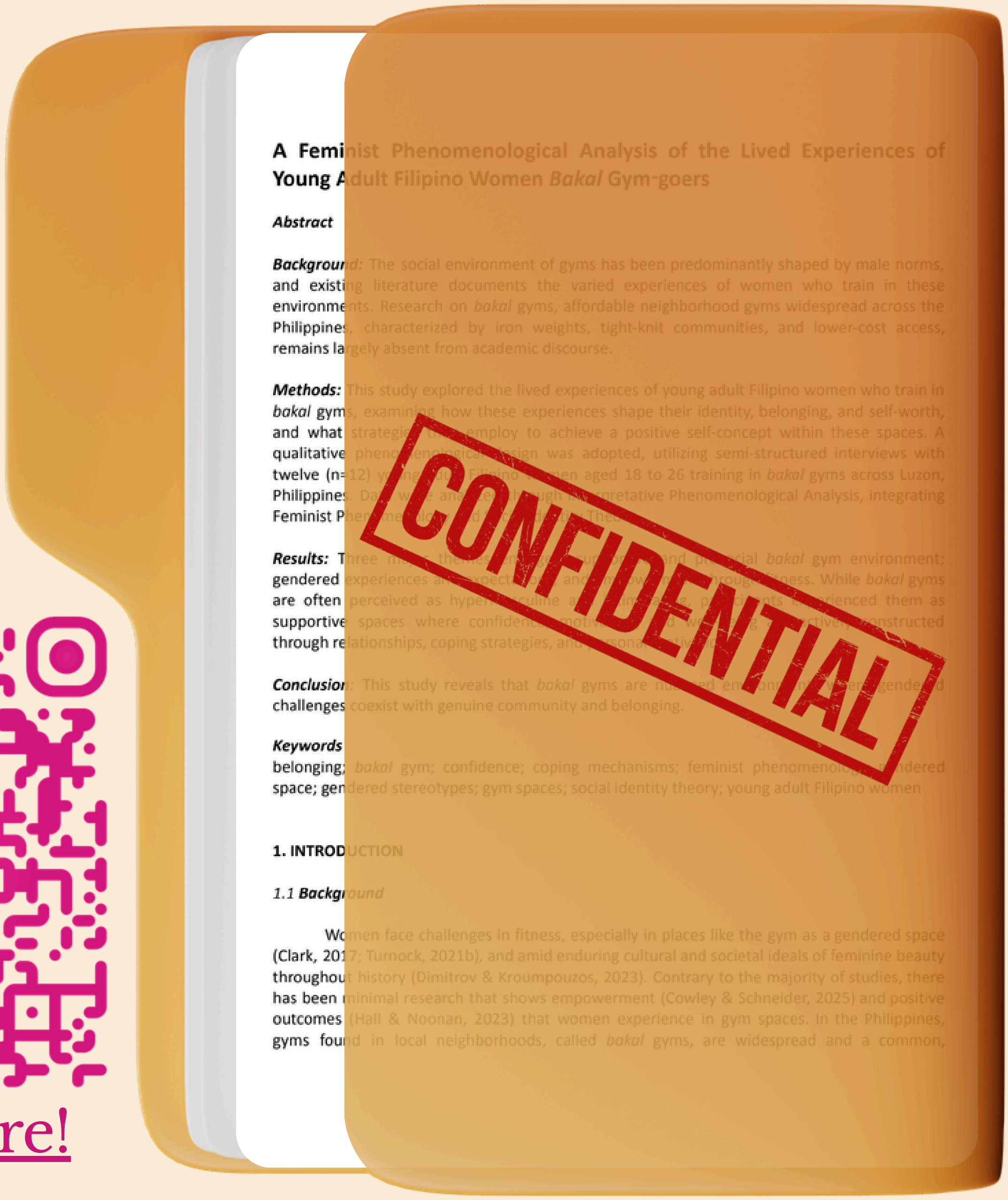
Exploring Cultural Stigmas and Gendered Fitness Stereotypes

Final Research Journal Article



A Feminist Phenomenological Analysis of the Lived Experiences of Young Adult Filipino Women *Bakal* Gym-goers

Abstract

Background: The social environment of gyms has been predominantly shaped by male norms, and existing literature documents the varied experiences of women who train in these environments. Research on *bakal* gyms, affordable neighborhood gyms widespread across the Philippines, characterized by iron weights, tight-knit communities, and lower-cost access, remains largely absent from academic discourse.

Methods: This study explored the lived experiences of young adult Filipino women who train in *bakal* gyms, examining how these experiences shape their identity, belonging, and self-worth, and what strategies they employ to achieve a positive self-concept within these spaces. A qualitative phenomenological design was adopted, utilizing semi-structured interviews with twelve (n=12) young adult Filipino women aged 18 to 26 training in *bakal* gyms across Luzon, Philippines. Data were analyzed through Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, integrating Feminist Phenomenology and Social Identity Theory.

Results: Three major themes emerged: supportive and prosocial *bakal* gym environment; gendered experiences and expectations; and empowerment through fitness. While *bakal* gyms are often perceived as hypermasculine and intimidating, participants experienced them as supportive spaces where confidence, motivation, and well-being are actively constructed through relationships, coping strategies, and personal motivation.

Conclusion: This study reveals that *bakal* gyms are nuanced environments where gendered challenges coexist with genuine community and belonging.

Keywords

belonging; *bakal* gym; confidence; coping mechanisms; feminist phenomenology; gendered space; gendered stereotypes; gym spaces; social identity theory; young adult Filipino women

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Women face challenges in fitness, especially in places like the gym as a gendered space (Clark, 2017; Turnock, 2021b), and amid enduring cultural and societal ideals of feminine beauty throughout history (Dimitrov & Kroumpouzos, 2023). Contrary to the majority of studies, there has been minimal research that shows empowerment (Cowley & Schneider, 2025) and positive outcomes (Hall & Noonan, 2023) that women experience in gym spaces. In the Philippines, gyms found in local neighborhoods, called *bakal* gyms, are widespread and a common,

Access it here!

One solid group of friends, one topic, and a journey none of us could have fully predicted when it began. What started as an intrusive thought, and admittedly, a joke about going to the gym, became one of the most defining experiences of our senior high school lives. We learned everything about research, the writing, the data, the endless revisions, but what stayed with us runs deeper than any of that. We learned what it means to build something together, to show up for each other across midnight Discord calls and grueling all-nighters, and to keep believing in a study even when the path forward was anything but clear.

We were an all-male team writing about women's lived experiences, and we were constantly challenged to prove that our lens was honest, careful, and worthy of the stories we were entrusted with. What carried us through was not perfection. It was persistence, the willingness to adapt when the work demanded it, the humility to sit with uncertainty, and the refusal to let any obstacle become the final word. We came into this research as students. We leave it as researchers who understand that the most meaningful findings are not always in the data. Sometimes, they are in the people you stayed up late with, and in everything you became together along the way.

Lessons from the Journey

“Quiet passions matter”

Sometimes you have to look into the deepest part of your interest, the part most people don’t snag a notice of. Take my passion for fitness: a simple inside joke—“I go gym”—can spark opportunities that let you empower certain communities, and in our case, amplify women’s experiences. So remember, it's often the most niche ideas that inspire the greatest changes.

Ulsano, 2007

“The process is in the people”

One of the most important decisions I made during my research journey was deciding who to be groupmates with. I chose my friends—we were the boys at the back, but also boys who know ball. I’m fortunate that my friends and I have complementary work ethics, but I know that many others don’t. So, before getting started with your research—or whatever it may be in life, make sure to choose carefully, as it is a choice that will either make or break the whole journey.

Dungca, 2008

“To be or not to be”

To be led to our victory, which would you choose? To be? Or not to be? This research journey of ours led us “to be” which is more than simply existing. To be curious enough to risk. To be resilient enough to overcome challenges. To be humble enough to accept criticism. To be courageous enough to keep flying; and to be enough not only as researchers or groupmates but as friends who stay and grow together. Without this success, we would never have truly learned what it means to be.

Ifurung, 2008

“Redirection is not regression”

That is the single most important thing this research journey taught me. There is a particular kind of grief that comes with letting go of something you built, a plan you believed in, a direction you were certain of. But what I have come to understand is that the moments that felt most like losing were actually the moments the work was becoming what it was always supposed to be. The path that looked like a setback was quietly, stubbornly, building toward something better. I came into this research thinking that success meant staying the course. I leave it knowing that sometimes, the most courageous thing you can do is change it.

Gomez, 2008

PINTUHO: Where the Current Began

Every voyage begins not with a sail raised or an anchor lifted, but with the quiet recognition that something lies beneath the surface worth diving into. Water does not ask permission before it finds its way through rock. It simply moves, persistent and purposeful, until it carves something new.

This is where our topic began. Not with certainty, but with a current. Women had long been training in bakal gyms scattered across Philippine neighborhoods, showing up to spaces built around iron and masculinity, navigating environments that existing literature had barely acknowledged. The gap in the literature was not subtle. It was a body of water with no map.

We dove in anyway. We began by tracing what little had been documented: blog posts, passing definitions, secondhand descriptions of the spaces. We listened to what foreign studies said about women in male-dominated gyms, about the discomfort, the stereotypes, the gendered expectations that followed them through the door. We noticed what those studies missed: the environment of a Filipino neighborhood gym, the warmth of its community, and to define what a bakal gym is.

The sea of existing literature was wide but shallow where it mattered most. Our study set out to go deeper, to follow the current toward something the scholarship had not yet reached: the lived, local, and largely untold experiences of young Filipino women who train in bakal gyms.

PANDAY: The Unyielding Forge

A blacksmith does not begin with the blade immediately formed. They begin with raw materials, sweat, and fire, with the understanding that what they are making will only take shape through an unyielding work. The forge does not rush. It transforms.

This is how we built our methodology. We chose a qualitative phenomenological design not because it was the easiest tool to pick up, but because it was the right one for the material we were working with. Lived experience cannot be measured. It must be listened to, interpreted, and handled with care.

We worked with twelve young adult Filipino women, aged eighteen to twenty-six, each recruited through purposive and snowball sampling to ensure their voices were rooted in genuine experience. We conducted semi-structured interviews online, asking predetermined questions and following wherever the conversation led. Every session was recorded, transcribed verbatim, and returned to each participant for member checking, because accuracy in this kind of work is not optional.

Our analytical framework was Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, practiced with bracketing at every stage to keep our own assumptions from bending the findings. We layered this with Feminist Phenomenology to hold the gendered dimensions of each account, and Social Identity Theory to examine how identity and belonging were shaped within these spaces.

The forge demanded precision. Every code, every theme, every interpretive decision was made by hand, deliberately and without shortcuts, because the women who trusted us with their stories deserved nothing less.

PANGHAW: Maintaining High Altitude

There is a moment in flight when the ground disappears beneath the clouds and what once seemed fixed and certain becomes small, distant, and newly complicated. That is what our findings did to the assumptions we carried into this study.

Three themes emerged from the sky of our data, each one widening the view. The first was a supportive and prosocial bakal gym environment, a finding that flew directly against the prevailing winds of existing literature. Where foreign studies described male-dominated fitness spaces as sites of anxiety and exclusion, our participants described something else entirely: encouragement from strangers, guidance offered without judgment, belonging built one interaction at a time.

The second theme brought turbulence. Gendered experiences and expectations reminded us that altitude does not erase what exists below. Misconceptions about femininity and strength, moments of being underestimated, and in some cases genuine harm, were all present in these women's accounts. The sky has weather. Community does not cancel out inequality.

The third theme brought the view into focus. Empowerment through fitness revealed that participants were not passive recipients of their environment. They coped, they resisted, they stayed. Their confidence was not given to them. It was built at elevation, forged in the very space that was supposed to make them feel small.

What opened up at altitude was a portrait of women who refused to stay on the ground.

PADAYON:
The Study Finds Its Star

Space does not end. It continues outward in every direction, past what any single telescope can reach, full of systems and bodies that have not yet been named. Every discovery made at its edges is not a conclusion. It is a coordinate, a point from which the next inquiry begins.

Our study lands here. We set out to explore the lived experiences of young adult Filipino women who train in bakal gyms, to understand how those experiences shaped their sense of identity, belonging, and self-worth, and what strategies they used to build a positive self-concept within spaces not originally designed for them. What we found was a constellation more nuanced than the literature had prepared us for.

Bakal gyms, despite their reputation as hypermasculine and intimidating, emerged in our participants' accounts as spaces of genuine community, quiet resilience, and unexpected belonging. Gendered challenges were real and present, but they coexisted with warmth, with peer support, with women who chose to stay not because the space was perfect but because they had made it theirs.

This is what we leave to the literature: not a final word, but a fixed point of light. Bakal gyms deserve further study, broader representation, and a formal definition that scholarship can hold. The women in these spaces deserve to be heard beyond these pages.

The stars do not stop at what we have already mapped. Our topic will forever be amongst stars waiting to be named, waiting for the next researcher brave enough to look up and ask what else is out there.

Acknowledgements

This study would not exist without four students who chose to care deeply about something bigger than themselves.

Over the course of almost two years, they endured late nights, relentless revisions, and the particular kind of exhaustion that only this kind of topic can produce, yet never once lost sight of why they started. Their dedication brought this scholarship from a question into something the literature can hold onto.

To their adviser, Janeson M. Miranda, and mentor, Nathaniel Rey D. Ferrer, who guided this work with patience and precision: this study carries the weight of your investment in it.

To the Humanities and Social Sciences Department, whose endorsement made space for humanistic inquiry to flourish: thank you for believing that these stories were worth telling.

And to De La Salle University, whose halls and classrooms became the ground on which this team learned not just how to research, but how to think, question, and care about the world more honestly: this work is, in no small way, a product of everything this institution taught us to become.

Research is often spoken of as an intellectual pursuit, but it is sustained by being human. By the people who loved this team enough to believe in their work even on the nights the team had stopped believing in it themselves.

To the friends and family who kept the lights on when everything felt difficult: this, too, belongs to you.

TERM 3, AY 2025-2026 | JULY 2026

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